

Judgment and Forgiveness



Thrust statement: Christians experience God's judgment of forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Scripture reading: [John 12:27-33](#); [Isaiah 28:9-13, 19-22](#)

God the Judge?

Does God judge people today? Can one avoid God's judgment of condemnation? How do you reconcile God's wrath with God's mercy? Should God judge you with wrath or mercy? Are the two concepts incompatible? How many Christians have difficulty with the judgments of God in the Old Testament? Is God fair in His discretion of mercy? Is God righteous in His vengeance on the rebellious? Should God punish the wicked? Should God still chastise the wicked even when they repent? Do you visualize God as a God of wrath? Or do you envision God as a God of compassion? Can God be both? Is the anger of God against sin believable to modern man? Is God's anger plausible to you as an individual? Is the rage of God against wrongdoing acceptable to the average Christian today? Since God is holy, should He be concerned with sin and punishment? Should He allow a Hitler to go unpunished? Should He allow a Stalin to go unpunished? Should He allow a Pol Pot to go unpunished? Should He allow me to go unpunished? How bad is sin?

As you view your own life, How do you perceive judgment? Do you believe that you are so bad that God will zap you? Do you believe that God is like a motorcycle cop, waiting for the least infraction of the law to zap you? Is your concept of God too small? Do you even deserve any judgment of condemnation or punishment? Just how do you view yourself and sin? Do you say, "Well, I am not so bad"?

When God portrayed radical judgment against the whole creation in [Genesis 3](#), did God overreact to the

sin of Adam and Eve? What about the worldwide flood in Genesis 6? When God dispersed the people at the tower of Babel in [Genesis 11](#), was God justified in this judgment?

When God said, "for I am grieved that I have made them" ([Genesis 6:7](#)), did He include us? Do I believe that God could say to me, "I'm sorry that I made Dallas Burdette? Are we so sure that God spoke about the other fellows and not us? Do we reason, How could God be sorry that He made you and me? Tyrants like Khomeini, certainly; despots like Hitler, absolutely; totalitarians like Pol Pot, unquestionably; oppressors like Stalin, yes indeed; terrorists like the Oklahoma bombers, of course. But God could never be sympathetic that He made you and me, so we think.

Israel and God's Judgment

Should God have punished Israel? Yes, we respond? Should God punish us? Well, that's a different story, isn't it? As a result of our concept of God's judgment, the passages in Isaiah, as cited above for our Scripture reading, become meaningless to us. Nevertheless, Isaiah pictures the judgment of God upon Israel by the Assyrians. Isaiah describes the punishment of Israel as "a little here, a little there" ([Isaiah 28:10](#)). Also, in the Isaiah passages, we witness the "tick-tock of God's judgment." In other words, Isaiah is saying that God is gradually destroying their lives because of their wickedness. For Isaiah, God judges us in all the little things of life – "a little here, a little there." God's judgment worked in the lives of the people in Isaiah's day. But does God's judgment continue to work its way into our lives? In the words of Isaiah, God's correction is "a little here, a little there— so that they will go and fall backward, be injured and snared and captured" ([Isaiah 28:13](#)).

But as Christians we resist that, don't we? What about the natural catastrophes occurring in our nation today? Could these devastations be "a little here and a little there"? Why do we contest the judgment of God? Is it not because it disturbs our picture of God? Does the portrayal of God as judge disturb our mental image of God? Isn't God a God of love, we ask? Is this view of God as judge against the grace we have experienced from Him in the person of Jesus Christ? Perhaps, for many, this range of vision of God's wrath does not fit in with His grace, as we see it. To say that the God of the cross is at the same time "like a moth to Ephraim, like rot to the people of Judah" ([Hosea 5:12](#)) is not consistent with our concept of God's mercy. Or is it? God, according to Hosea, eats away at the fabric of our lives and like dry rot He undermines our fragile foundation in order to call into question our understanding of the nature of God whom we worship. God wanted His people to admit their guilt and then He would heal them. In fact, God says through Hosea:

Then I will go back to my place
until they admit their guilt.
And they will seek my face;
in their misery they will earnestly seek me" ([Hosea 5:15](#)).
Again, Hosea says,
"Come, let us return to the LORD.
He has torn us to pieces
but he will heal us;
he has injured us ([Hosea 6:1](#)).

God is still willing to heal. He will heal you too if you will only turn to His Son Jesus. If one does not turn to the Lord for healing, there can only be condemnation, not eternal life. Does God's wrath appear strange and alien to you? God has no choice but to punish evil doings because of His holy nature. Still, to modern man, judgment appears to be out of harmony with his concept of God as a God of mercy,

kindness and love. Yes, even Isaiah also acknowledges an apparent incongruity with such a witness to God as Hosea witnessed concerning God's anger. This kind of wrath appears to be foreign to the nature of God.

The LORD will rise up as he did at Mount Perazim,
he will rouse himself as in the Valley of Gibeon—
to do his work, his **strange work**,
and perform his task, **his alien task** ([Isaiah 28:21](#)).

This "strange work" and "alien task" is contrary to the general concept of God's mercy. And yet, there is no softening of the message by Isaiah:

Now stop your mocking,
or your chains will become heavier;
the Lord, the LORD Almighty, has told me
of the destruction decreed against the whole land ([Isaiah 28:22](#)).

God's Judgment Centers in Jesus

Could it be that the God of love and mercy is also truly the Lord, and that He will not be satisfied with anything less than the complete surrender of one's life in worship. Since God is Lord, He must judge evil. The death of Christ upon the cross testifies to God's judgment against sin. We may deny God's punishment against the awfulness of sin, but Jesus did not share in this denial. In fact, Jesus, through His self-sacrifice, took our sins upon Himself and allowed sin to be put to death in His body ([Isaiah 53](#)). Isaiah (739 BC) foretold about God's Suffering Servant that would deal with the problem of sin:

Surely he took up our infirmities
and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all ([Isaiah 53:4-6](#)).

Jesus is God's way of dealing with the sin problem. Sin has to die if God is Lord. Jesus accepted that judgment of death for "us all." He willingly gave his life for our sins to glorify God's justice, love, and mercy. Jesus came to the planet earth to make atonement for the sin dilemma. What did Jesus say about His own mission? Jesus clearly states His mission: "**Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.**" ([John 12:27](#)).

Paul's Concept of God's Justice

Since God is just, must He not punish sin? Can God allow sin to go unpunished? Is there a way out for man's sinfulness? How? Well, Paul explains how God can be just and at the same time forgive man's

sinfulness. Paul wrote:

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus ([Romans 3:25-26](#)).

How did God solve the sin dilemma? Jesus is God's response! God presented Jesus as atonement for the sins of mankind. In this transaction of atonement, God demonstrated His justice in that He did not allow sin to go unpunished. Again, we ask, **God the judge?** Yes! God judged sin and still judges sin. How could a righteous judge not judge man's sinfulness? Paul painted a rather dismal picture of mankind in his iniquities:

What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written:

"There is no one righteous, not even one;
11 there is no one who understands,
no one who seeks God.
All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one."
"Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit."
"The poison of vipers is on their lips."
"Their mouths are full of cursing and
bitterness."
"Their feet are swift to shed blood;
ruin and misery mark their ways,
and the way of peace they do not know."
"There is no fear of God before their
eyes" ([Romans 3:9-18](#)).

Is there no escape from God's judgment? Yes, God has provided a way of escape for mankind. How? Paul explained the "how" in his Roman letter:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus ([Romans 3:20-21](#)).

God's final lordship is that He puts us to death in order to make us alive in Jesus. He does away with our evil in order to make us new. He also subjects us to daily judgments to recreate us for eternal love. In our reading of Isaiah, one discovers that even in the midst of a flood of wrath, God did not leave Israel without hope. In fact, Isaiah saw a new cornerstone:

"See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation;
the one who trusts will never be dismayed.
I will make justice the measuring line
and righteousness the plumb line; ([Isaiah 28:16-17](#))

Even in the face of God's judgments, God still announces hope for Israel. In the midst of destruction, God speaks of salvation. In other words, Isaiah describes the way of escape from God's judgment. The book of Isaiah is filled with messianic prophecies of hope. This "stone" is none other than Jesus, the hope of mankind – "the one who trusts will never be dismayed." Jesus reminded the chief priests and the elders of the people that this "stone" prophecy related to Himself ([Matthew 21:42](#)). In order to accomplish this redemption, Jesus became atonement for the sins of the people. As Jesus confronts the horror of being lifted up on the cross, He promises that death will lead to eternal life for us all.

Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die ([John 12:31-36](#)).

Again, the question is, Does God judge? And the answer is, yes! Do you reject the judgment of God as inconceivable? Denial of God's doomsday will not allow you to escape His correction. In order for one to escape God's wrath of condemnation, one must put his or her trust in Jesus. Dismissal of Jesus brings one under God's vengeance. God has surrendered judgment to the Son. What does the Son say about this judgment?

Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life ([John 5:22-24](#)).

Do you wish to escape the judgment of God? Then, hear the words of Jesus and believe Him who sent Jesus. This one, says Jesus, will escape God's wrath of condemnation.

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